

# MULLAN CHRONICLES

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## Sherman Re-opened Mullan Road

(This article was found by Mullanite, Robert Dunsmore of Osburn, ID in *The Pacific Northwestern*, Winter 1958; reprinted with permission.

Part Four

Continued from last edition

By Joe Baily

The Nez Perce fighting was ensuing when Sherman made the crossing of the Mullan Road. Helena was then the capital of Montana territory, and Sherman wrote from it on August 29 (1877). The road between Helena and Benton he had found well-traveled, seeing many ox and mule teams, the wagons joined in twos and threes so that six yoke of cattle or pairs of mules could handle trains with three or four tone of freight. Now his eyes were turned westward.

He wrote this: "My conviction is also that the best interests of this people and of the nation call for a closer relation with the Pacific states and territories, and it is with this view that tomorrow I turn in that direction. There was once a wagon road hence to Walla Walla, the Mullan Road, on which a good deal of money was spent. For years it was traveled but was now it has gone into disuse; Its bridges are all gone and fallen timber so obstructs it that I expect to drop my wagons at or near Missoula and take to horses and packs. The probability is that we will go via Missoula, Coeur d'Alene, Spokane Bridge, Lewiston, etc."

His next letter was from Portland reporting on the crossing. He said that in Missoula he had found many

who had crossed by the Mullan Road and all had insisted he couldn't possibly make it with wagons without infinite labor. In the first three days he and his men and wagons made 72 miles, finding the Mullan road plain and good. (*This would make it at about the crossing at St. Regis - KS*)

From there Sherman's party began to wield axes. The road was still plain, easy to follow, but all bridges had been swept away and fallen trees were everywhere. They

had to pile the trees sometimes to get their wagons over. Sherman said:

**...all had insisted he couldn't possibly make it with wagons without infinite labor.**

"At last the lowly mule which had performed such wondrous action was now performing the feat of climbing a tree."

"This road should be reopened to travel," her wrote. "I have crossed it with wagons, which is proof that it is possible, and I am convinced that next summer by the labor of two detachments of infantry, one working west from Missoula, the other east from Coeur

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### Mullan Day – Come to DeBorgia on Saturday, May 8, 1pm MDT.

Two new speakers from Idaho and Washington will present the program at the next Mullan Day.

Dr. J. William T. Youngs, of the Department of History, Eastern Washington University, Cheney, has been working on aspects of the road for his department along with a group of students. They are participants in a Teaching American History project whose focus this year is "Roads, Trails, and Journeys," developing materials for K-12 teachers. He and his students made a trip to Superior last fall and had a great time going through our files.

Jim Stravens from Coeur d'Alene will explain what his office is doing with mapping the road. They have completed mapping from Walla Walla to the Montana border and are interested in doing the Montana section.

There will be refreshments and a possible "walk-about" on a section near DeBorgia. Try and come and enjoy our yearly get-together.

MC



# Sherman noted a vocabulary of cusswords

*(continued from Page One)*

d'Alene, the road can be made good enough for present wants."

It was not until 1879, however, that Sherman's suggestion for improving the Mullan Road could be put into effect.

Detachments were sent out on the road that August, following Sherman's directions to the minute, meeting on the summit, working back. Captain William Mills of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry headed the western work detachment. His party met Captain William H. Penrose with men from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry at Fort Missoula on August 15 on the summit.

\* \* \*

Now we are approaching the final episode in this review of the Mullan Road. On October 15, 1880, there appeared in the Weekly Missoulian

an account by "Bob," as he called himself. "Over the Coeur d'Alenes." He found soldiers, still under the inspiration of Sherman no doubt, still working on the road, but the going wasn't good.

\* \* \*

Far from that, the way was terribly bad. Crossing the summit of the Coeur d'Alene mountains, he commented, "If the traveler has any vocabulary of cusswords stored up in his memory they voluntarily come to his tongue's end and burst forth in emphatic expression. By the time he reaches the bottom on the Idaho side he can't do the subject justice."

\* \* \*

In 1883, the next time General Sherman came calling, he didn't have to come over the Mullan Road. He

came by railroad to Rathdrum.

\* \* \*

Sherman it was who said in a letter from the Mullan Road in August, 1879, "All dream of a railroad but I discourage the thought and believe that for many years the people must content themselves with the Missouri river navigable as far as Benton, the Yellowstone as high as the Big Horn, with teams to haul hence and from the Pacific 400 miles distant."

\* \* \*

But Sherman, who ought to have known, something about heroic endeavor, was overlooking the resolution and vigor of Man, the same resolution and vigor that drove John Mullan through some of the ruggedest mountain in America with his road builders 20 years before.

## Caitlan Mullan, Great-niece of our road builder, is married



*Caitlin Mullan, daughter of Dr. Fitzhugh Mullan and great niece of John Mullan at her wedding to Wes Crain on August 31, 2003 in Wells, ME.*

Caitlin Mullan, daughter of Dr. Fitzhugh Mullan and great niece of John Mullan (her great, great grandfather was John Mullan's brother) was married to Wes Crain on August 31, 2003 in Wells, ME. Caitlin is a doctoral student in ecology and evolutionary biology at Brown University.

Caitlin accompanied her parents and grandparents, Dr. Hugh and

Marquita Mullan, to the first Mullan Day in July 1989 when the John Mullan statue in St. Regis was relocated to the foot of Camels Hump road engineered by Caitlin's great-great grand-uncle.

On January 1, 2003, Wes and Caitlin visited in Superior on their way to the coast. Stopping in Mullan, ID the next day, Wes proposed to Caitlin in front of the Mullan statue in that town.



## MR's friend Bob Dunsmore

In the News-Press of the Silver Valley in November of 2003, there was a great article of our good friend, Bob Dunsmore of Osborn, ID. It said Bob put his interest in the Mullan Road as "a point of interest." Bob has been a great friend of our group going out of his way locating and sharing anything on Mullan. His scrapbooks are real treasures that he brought over last year to the Mullan Day in Alberton.

In October when Bob came over to help when Dr. Youngs came over he brought an article about the residence halls at Montana State University.

In explaining where the name of Mullan Hall got its name we quote: "Mullan Hall was named after John Mullan who was a First Lieutenant in the Lewis and Clark Expedition throughout Montana (1803-1806)."



*Bob Dunsmore*

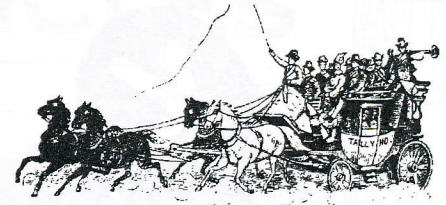
### Now wired!!

[mrshezzie@blackfoot.net](mailto:mrshezzie@blackfoot.net)  
Memberships are now shown as Volume and Issue number, so 10-2 means you are due to renew. Thank you for all the support you have given us in over 10 years of trying to share information on this most fascinating man and his venture.

## MR attracted Oregon Trail wagons

*From Panhandle History about early travel through the Idaho Panhandle we found this to illustrate the usefulness of the new road from Montana Territory to Washington:*

During the summer of 1862, the first large group to use the Mullan Road passed through north Idaho. It consisted of 300 emigrants in covered wagons, on their way to Oregon. At the time it was thought the Mullan Road was a better and faster route than the Oregon Trail. Gold seekers and freight wagons followed so that by 1866, it was estimated that 20,000 people, 300 wagons, 6,000 pack animals and 5,000 head of cattle had passed over this road.



## from the mail pouch

A mail from Prof. Paul McDermott, Feb. 14, 2004:

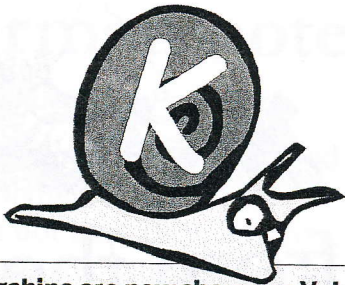
The vote or decision to accept the revised name for St. Regis pass won't be made until this summer. I was informed that one US Forest Service agrees with the proposal. Both districts must agree however, since the pass is on the state line.

Local support is critical to the acceptance. Contact any Forest Service people in Idaho and see if they will back up the idea.

The geographic names board in both Montana and Idaho also have a say in the adaptation and that too can be a very political affair. Again Idaho is pivotal.

I am planning to come out west in early September. Hope to see all you folks at that time. I hope we can celebrate by getting together for gathering at the top of Sohon Pass. Gustavus deserves the recognition.





**We won't give up, hope you won't give up on us!**  
 We will continue to get the *Chronicles* out. When you pay for a year you will get a full four issues no matter how many years it takes!

Memberships are now shown as Volume and issue number, i.e., if yours shows 10-2 it means you are now due to renew. Also my email address is [mrshezzie@blackfoot.net](mailto:mrshezzie@blackfoot.net). Thank you for all the support you have given us in over 10 years of trying to share information on this most fascinating man and his venture. You will get four issues for your membership dues! Be patient with us please, for there is hope.

MC

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Cathryn (Kay) Strombo, Editor

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